



TAKE FIVE  
TO AGE WELL



# Take Five to Age Well

## Policy Brief

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# Urgent Action Needed: Transforming the health of an ageing population

The NHS is crucial for older people, many of whom live with multiple long-term conditions (LTCs). However, healthcare remains fragmented, focusing on single conditions rather than holistic, ongoing support. This leads to poorer outcomes, avoidable ill health, and reduced independence. With an ageing population, this model is increasingly unsustainable.

Health inequalities further compound the challenge throughout the UK. Those in England's most deprived areas experience disability for 17 more years than their wealthier counterparts. Similarly, figures from Scotland and Wales indicate that people living in the least affluent areas face fewer healthy years than elsewhere, a challenge that is more pronounced for women than men, particularly in Wales. In Northern Ireland, over half the population over the age of 65 report having a disability or long-term health condition that limits daily activities.

Urgent action is needed to ensure fair access to care and to shift towards proactive, community-based support. Strengthening community care is essential to keeping older people healthy, independent, and out of hospital. The NHS must act now to redesign services, prioritising prevention and integration to meet the needs of our ageing population.

However, this is only part of the solution. We all have a part to play in staying healthy for as long as possible, so that we delay the need for formal healthcare. There is an urgent need for effective interventions to reduce the risk of LTCs and promote better self-management and health behaviours as well as prevention being central to government plans across the UK.



# Take Five to Age Well Campaign

Take Five to Age Well (Take Five) is a public health campaign and research project that proactively engages the public in actions to boost health and wellbeing for the short and longer term. The campaign targets people aged 50+ and asks them to 'sign up' and commit to a month of small, daily actions. Actions are themed under nutrition, hydration, social and cognitive stimulation, and physical activity. We support people during the month with regular email communications underpinned by behaviour change frameworks to turn those daily actions into habits for long-term health and wellbeing.

Take Five capitalises on the success of pledge-style models, such as Dry January and Stoptober, targeting a new but familiar audience in a holistic health campaign. Run by trusted sources – Age UK and The Open University (OU) – the campaign is uniquely positioned to provide information to support healthy ageing to a broad and potentially vast audience, nudging individuals towards healthier behaviours in the short and long term.

Take Five is based on the Five Pillars for Ageing Well model, incorporating insights from four years of the Ageing Well Public Talk Series, participatory co-design approaches, and strategic partnerships with over 250 stakeholder organisations across the UK. Aligned with the OU's societal mission and Open Societal Challenge agenda, this innovative, nationwide public health campaign is a timely and essential initiative to prevent disease in older people, a key public health priority.

In September 2023, we ran Take Five as a month-long pilot campaign to test the model and evaluate engagement. Participants were supported to take a healthy ageing action aligned with the Five Pillars of Ageing Well: Nutrition, Hydration, Physical Activity, Social Connection, and Cognitive Stimulation. In total, 3,254 people aged 50 and over participated in the campaign, committing to one or more actions over the month.

We conducted four surveys to assess participants motivation, experience, adherence, and long-term commitment to Take Five actions over one, five, and nine months. Collaborating with behaviour change experts and stakeholders – including clinicians, commissioners, and individuals with lived experience – we refined Take Five to maximise its effectiveness and impact.



# Take Five: A Successful Step Toward Healthier Ageing

Take Five successfully encouraged healthier routines among participants, with strong adherence throughout the pledge period. Over 80% of those who completed the survey at the end of the pledge month reported following their chosen action five or more days per week. At nine months, 87% were still doing the action they chose four or more days in a week. These findings show that Take5 supported people with creating new routines and that the majority of respondents were able to keep the routines/habits for most days of the week after nine months from when the pledge finished.

Popular actions included improving nutrition and increasing physical activity – key factors in long-term well-being.

Women made up 83% of participants, highlighting their role in family health networks and the potential for wider indirect impact. While most participants were White British, highly educated and less deprived, future iterations of the campaign will focus on engaging more diverse communities.

Participants valued the ongoing support provided, particularly engaging emails and offline resources piloted by Age Scotland. Regular communication was cited as a key motivator, reinforcing the power of structured guidance in sustaining positive health habits.

In 2024, Age UK and the OU were successful in gaining funding to run Take Five to Age Well in May 2025. The campaign aligns with Age UK's strategic aim to transform public attitudes towards ageing, taking a positive 'can-do' approach to ageing as healthily and independently as possible.





# Policy Recommendations for Healthy Ageing

## 1. Address Health Inequalities in Ageing

- Ensure equitable access to healthcare and preventative services for older people in deprived areas, where disability rates are disproportionately high.
- Embed targeted interventions to reduce the gap in healthy life expectancy.

## 2. Scale Up Community-Led Healthy Ageing Initiatives

- Expand public health campaigns like Take Five to Age Well to encourage proactive health behaviours and reduce the risk of long-term conditions.
- Increase investment in voluntary sector partnerships to deliver localised, culturally relevant health interventions.

## 3. Leverage Behaviour Change Models to Promote Healthy Habits

- Implement evidence-based public health campaigns using behaviour change frameworks to support long-term habit formation.
- Provide structured guidance and ongoing motivation through digital and offline engagement, ensuring sustained participation.

## 4. Encourage Gender-Inclusive Participation in Healthy Ageing Programmes

- Develop strategies to engage more men in preventative health campaigns, recognising the influence of women in family health networks.
- Tailor messaging and outreach to appeal to diverse demographics and address barriers to participation.

## 5. Embed Healthy Ageing into government strategies across the four nations

- Integrate prevention-focused initiatives like Take Five into national ageing policies and funding priorities. Given the devolved nature of health policy, initiatives such as Take Five need to be embedded into national strategies in each of the four nations in order to promote the health and wellbeing of older people wherever they live in the UK.
- Recognise and support the role of trusted organisations like Age UK and its network partners Age Scotland, Age Cymru and Age NI, in delivering large-scale, impactful health interventions.



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**Dewi Knight, Director**

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